8-2014

Gender, Humor and Quality of Life in Workplace Sitcoms: A Content Analysis Examining Agency in Post-Recession Situation Comedies

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication

by

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University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Communication, 2011

August 2014
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This study used content analysis to analyze gender representations in post-recession workplace sitcoms using a typology developed using Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. 100 episodes of programming were analyzed by five graduate researchers for a total of 2579 cases. Though men dominated the sample, results were dissimilar from previous findings within some of the literature on televised representations of gender. Findings indicated that need type for most commonly expressed needs were split fairly evenly by gender, but that less expressed needs were more polarized with regard to gender representation. Women also met their own needs more than men did, and had others meet their needs more than men, though men more often had their needs met by happenstance.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the team of graduate coders, Reis Marzana, Gene Nelson, Katie Russel, and Betty Wang, who undertook a semester of learning the codebook, fine-tuning definitions, and putting in the countless hours necessary to collect this data. This would not have been possible without you.

Special thanks to the University of Arkansas faculty, to Dr. Stephanie Schulte and Dr. Kasey L. Walker, my committee members, who offered support and encouragement throughout this process. And special thanks to Ron Warren, my thesis director, who gave outstanding guidance, invaluable insights, and unwavering confidence throughout this process. You have given me a better model for producing meaningful, forward-thinking research than I could ever have hoped for.

Dedication

  This work is dedicated to the persons mentioned above; to the faculty of the Communication department of the University of Arkansas, to my committee members, and thesis director, as well as to my graduate cohort, all of whom were my second family during graduate school.

  And to my parents, who supported my decision to pursue graduate study, and who believed in me when I needed it the most.

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Introduction

Since the economic downturn in the United States at the end of 2007, issues of employment and job security have become pressing. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reports that an estimated 11.7 million people were unemployed with an additional 7.6 million individuals categorized as "involuntary part-time" bringing the total number of unemployed or underemployed persons during the economic recession to 19.3 million. With an increased need to secure steady income, many job seekers are accepting positions that are classified beneath their acquired level of education or experience (Sum & Khatiwada, 2010). Younger workers are more likely than older, more established workers to hold multiple jobs and usually do so for financial reasons, such as paying bills or managing debt, as opposed to the procurement of additional expertise in a new field (Hipple, 2010). Just over 3,000 mass layoff actions were taken in February of 2009 which is estimated to have affected a little over 320,000 workers (Spotlight on Statistics, 2012).

For those employed or soon to be employed, demands are high. It is conceivable that for many workers, certain factors that contribute to a healthy quality of life, such as stress management, personal health, interpersonal relationships, and pursuit of higher-status jobs may be sacrificed in exchange for higher job security. As employees feel they have less control over economic factors that affect their livelihood, they may feel pressure to sacrifice certain standards regarding their quality of life – sacrifices which they might not make in a more vibrant hiring economy. One survey (Despite some bright spots, 2010) indicated that 62% of respondents reported feeling less secure in their jobs since the recession began and 37% felt more negatively about their job than before the economic downturn in late 2007. The same survey reported that

though 57% of respondents stated they have had to assume additional job responsibilities as a result of company layoffs, 93% say that they did not receive a pay raise, and 53% indicated that they felt their job negatively affected their health.

For new workers and those soon to be hired, the media may act as a lens through which to view the social and economic climate. With limited first-hand experience of the workforce, younger persons may garner some expectations about the rules and norms of the workforce from televised representations (Bandura, 2001b; Morgan, Shanahan & Signiorelli, 2009). Some researchers have noted that viewers who are unfamiliar with a given body of knowledge may obtain information that informs and enforces their opinion from entertainment media and that viewers often select media choices that, to some extent, are in line with their beliefs (Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011; Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2009). Additionally, viewers tend to select program types that manage moods, indicating that media choices may arise as part of a desire to cope with factors they feel are beyond their control. Findings in this research indicate that stressful moods may be managed with comedy viewing (Anderson, Collins, Schmidt & Jacobvits, 1996).

Situation comedies, which have typically been high in viewership among young adults, pair humor with various real-life scenarios and provide a comedic context for the everyday. While studies of humor in real-world workplace scenarios have found that humor can be used to increase inclusion and sense-making (Tracy, Myers, & Scott, 2006), it has also been theorized that humor can minimize critical processing of themes and elements in media messages (Young, 2008). A large body of economic and sociological research has examined gender variation within the workforce, and media scholars continue to find inequitable portrayals of gender in the media. However, there remains a dearth of research regarding gender representations on television with

regard to humorous workplace environments. The compounding factors of the economic recession, uncertain work environments for emergent high school and college graduates, and inequitable media portrayals of gender on television have set the stage for an analysis of media messages directed to young people regarding humorous depictions of the workforce.

Review of the Literature

With the rise of the women's labor movement in the early 1900's, the experiences of and perceptions about women in the US labor force have come under scrutiny. Researchers have examined long held stereotypes concerning women in the workforce in order to better determine the pervasiveness of such beliefs (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Geller & Hobfall, 1994; Heilman, 2000). Eagly and Steffen (1984) found that women were perceived as being more communal as employees and men as being more agentic (or empowered to affect change). This perception among their participants arose because of perceived social roles of men and women rather than misconceptions of inherent differences between the sexes. This indicates that stereotypes become reinforced by observed relations of social roles and that different sexes may adhere to roles they feel they are expected to fulfill (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Some business management researchers have posited that as the pool of qualified female applicants grows larger, more women will assume jobs in upper management at the top of the pay scale (Forbes, Piercy & Hayes, 1988) and that women intrinsically do not possess characteristics required for higher-paying managerial jobs, citing the fact that they often sacrifice their own advancement for the sake of maintaining harmony within the community and tend to defer more to what others think (Fueur, 1988).

By this logic, it follows that the perception of women as less agentic in the workplace would be more pervasive during decades when there were fewer women working (such as the 1980's), and a surge of women into the pool of total employees in recent decades would likely increase the amount of represented characteristics (communal, or seeking harmony with others over one's own advancement, and individually agentic) within the female labor force. This view posits that as more women become qualified for and assume upper management and leadership

positions, these stereotypes will diminish and foster new perceptions of female employees. However, while the number of working men and women has almost equalized, and while many women of equal education and experience are working in industries that have typically been comprised primarily of male workers, a pay gap remains (Boraas & Rodgers, 2003; Weinberg, 2007). In light of this information, it seems pertinent to examine many factors that contribute to expectations of the workplace in addition to education and experience, and one way in which an individual might develop perceptions about work is through media use.

Gender Stereotypes, Workplace, and Comedy Programming

Mass media studies (Elesmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003, Greenberg, 1980; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; McNeil, 1975) have often found inequitable portrayals of women and men in media. In a content analysis of TV shows, Glascock (2001) found that 40% of main characters were female; and Lauzen, Dozier and Cleveland (2006) found that only 38% of speaking characters on scripted television shows were female. Researchers have consistently found that women on prime time television are younger than their male counterparts (Davis, 1990; Elesmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999; Glascock; Lauzen, Dozier and Reyes, 2007; Signorielli, 1989), frequently portrayed as underweight (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000), more likely than men to be dressed provocatively, more likely than men to be portrayed as being married (where men have indeterminate marital status or are depicted as single) (Glascock), and more likely to be depicted as parents (McNeil, 1975).

Given these overall findings, it is unsurprising that women are also portrayed differently than men in the televised workplace. Signorielli and Bacue (1999), in an analysis of three decades of dramatic programming, found that women were more likely to be shown working in

the later decade of their analysis, and that job prestige for women had increased over time. This indicated a trend toward more positive televised models of working women. However, increased exposure does not always mean equitable portrayals. More recent accounts have found that women were less likely to be identified as either working or not working than men (Glascock, 2001; Signorielli, 2009). Men were more likely to be portrayed as bosses (Glascock, 2001; McNeil, 1975), and were also more likely to be employed in positions with higher income brackets than their female counterparts. Glascock (2001) also found that the job breakdown of characters (outside of depictions of law enforcement) was highly gendered. Men were more likely to be depicted as doctors, lawyers and judges and women as waitresses, nurses and secretaries. Further, women on television were often portrayed in interpersonal roles, while men were shown in work-related roles (Lauzen, Dozier and Horan, 2008). Conversely, women were portrayed as less inept than men in performing household related chores in humorous commercials, which could be interpreted as a reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles and competencies in the home versus the workplace (Scharrer, et. al, 2009). Ultimately, the concern that scholars have in light of this information is that limited portrayals of women as leaders may provide few scripts of successful, agentic women with whom viewers can identify (McNeil, 1975; Signiorelli, 2009) . Only through action does an individual exercise their right to improve their surroundings and subsequent quality of life.

An Agentic Perspective on Quality of Life

Quality of life, as a concept, has a diverse history. It is primarily used for either macro-economic analyses of populations to inform policy (Hicks, Tinkler & Allin,; Kroll & Delhey; Pissourios), or as a means of assessing the success of physical or mental health interventions (Gill & Feinstein, 1994). In the former sense, what determines a population's quality of life is

assessed by factors such as availability of raw resources (such as food and shelter) and overall health of a population. In the latter sense, quality of life is determined primarily by an individual's self-report concerning factors such as how happy they feel and how much agency they feel they have in their recovery or self-improvement. A central theme is that both definitions have a vested interest in the individual's level of agency, both perceived and material. Agency is a central component to this discussion of quality of life and it relates to an individual's ability to enact change or affect their surroundings. It is the perception and reality of agency that allows an individual to improve their condition when those conditions are unsafe or inequitable. In order to understand how factors contributing to quality of life intersect in the workplace and in agentic action, we can examine recent theories that attempt to define and categorize the concept.

Diener and Suh (1997) outline three perspectives in research on "quality of life" that attempt to elucidate this term. The first perspective is largely reliant on examination of cultural norms as defined by religious, philosophical or other type of systems. In this sense, what one perceives to be a high quality of life, such as the number and quality of material goods, would be determinant upon dominant cultural influences that set normative expectations for the individual. The second perspective is based on the rationale that each person has unique preferences and that quality of life for that individual is determined upon adhering to those preferences. It posits that people will, within the best of their abilities, select products and lifestyles that are in order with these preferences and that their satisfaction is predicated upon individual differences and selection in line with those differences. The third perspective on the concept of quality of life focuses on the experiences of the individual. If one perceives that her/his quality of life is good, it is. From these three perspectives, two types of measurement for quality of life have emerged:

one looks at social factors pertaining to socioeconomic resources and available choices, and the other to subjective or self-report measures of wellbeing.

Agency is a central concept in literature on behavior and social roles within the workplace, as well as in quality of life studies. Agency refers to an individual's ability to alter their surroundings and is believed to "address the issue of what it means to be human" (Bandura, 2001a, p.6). The concept is crucial to the ways in which a person interacts with her/his surroundings. The ability to affect change determines how and why an individual makes the choices he or she makes. Bandura (2001a) outlines four characteristics of agency. The first, intentionality, is a proactive commitment to bringing about future actions via action in the present. The second characteristic, forethought, indicates that the agent perceives future ramifications or outcomes based upon present action choices. The third characteristic, self-reactiveness, refers to the actor's ability to modify behavior, goals, and expectations to adjust for the most desired outcome. Finally, self-reflectiveness indicates an ability to reflect upon new experiences and evaluate values and goals. The notion of agency in Bandura's (1986) work is inextricably tied to the notion of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's self-perceived ability to affect change within his/her environment. These factors, agency and self-efficacy, are constantly at work within the mind and behavior of the agent. An individual with high material resources to affect change (money, food) will accomplish nothing without believing that they might affect change, for belief in expected future consequence is what motivates a person to do anything, even minute tasks.(Bandura, 1986, 2000a).

From an agentic perspective, given that the actor has the mental facilities to react and reflect, we can presume that a social actor (or, in the case of television, a character) will also respond to needs based on an expectation of those needs to be met or denied. In order to assess

whether a character expresses a presence or absence of a perceived need, we can utilize Maslow's (1958) hierarchy of needs, which outlines five subsets of types of needs an individual may wish to fill. These are: a) physiological needs, which relate to the effective internal workings of the individual (the maintaining of body temperature, chemical balance, nutritional balance, and adequate sleep for the brain to function); b) safety needs, which relate to a person's perceived safety (either physical or emotional); c) affiliatory needs, which refer to a person's desire to have close relationships as well as feel a connection to a larger group such as a society or a subgroup such as with coworkers; d) esteem needs, which encompass both the desire to feel competent and the need to receive recognition from others; and e) self-actualization needs, which encompass an individual's desire to achieve their fullest potential.

Maslow asserts that these needs are fluid and do not necessarily occur in a given order, but rather that some needs will take precedence over others in different situations. Individuals may be preoccupied in the early stages of their working careers with needs such as earning rent to avoid frigid temperatures (a physiological need), adequately performing tasks (an esteem need), and fostering social bonds with coworkers (an affiliatory need). Over time, though, these needs are subject to change as the individual triages them and moves on to new obstacles (for example, the need for self-actualization later in one's career). However, there is an assumption that the satiation of certain needs takes precedence over satisfying other needs at certain times. That is, there will be a hierarchy in demand for needs based on the situation (real or perceived) by the individual.

Humorous Media Portrayals of Agency & Quality of Life

Workplace sitcoms, in addition to providing humorous contexts for everyday scenarios, can also act as indicators of changes within American culture and can aid the viewer in understanding the world as it might be. Shows like The *Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Laverne and Shirley* chronicled changing views about women and labor when cultural norms surrounding the face of the workforce were shifting. Historically, sitcoms have enjoyed high viewership, especially among younger audiences (Albianiak, 2013). Even when sitcoms experience low ratings, networks often depend upon sitcom rebroadcasts to boost viewership. Networks are in the business of garnering and maintaining audiences, and the content they produce is necessarily a function of that goal. The shows they produce will rely on cultural and industry scripts that they believe the largest amount of viewers will tune in for. Even so, examining representations of gender, need type, and agency on workplace sitcoms provides insight into the television landscape that new workers experience. Additionally, we can generalize that viewers will have dealt with needs in their own experiences as Maslow details. While story may rule content production on situation comedies, much of the audience may view content from a need-driven frame of reference, thus adding to the show's audience appeal.

These distinctions of action and self-efficacy are extremely important when conceptualizing women at work and their televised counterparts. Workplace literature has indicated that there are differences between the perceptions of agentic persons and communal persons (Conway, Pizzamiglio & Mount, 1996). Those who are more communal are perceived as less agentic. If social roles that are associated with one gender are increasingly portrayed in one manner and that mode of portrayal is counterintuitive to advancement within the workplace, the employee may be constrained by perceptions of both available action (physical or support

resources) as well as personal ability to take action (self-efficacy). In the post-recession economy, as physical resources are, in fact, limited, working women and men face even greater constraints. Given these factors, an analysis of the needs expressed in TV sitcom characters seems timely. Additionally, analyzing the program genre of sitcoms may provide better insights into the emergent workforce, as younger viewers tend to gravitate toward comedy (Mares and Sun, 2010).

This is important because jokes elicit emotional responses from viewers and, to a large degree, it is unclear exactly how such responses alter the ways in which an individual experiences humor. Raskin (1985) asserts that humor relies upon competing scripts that often contradict each other. In this explanation, one situational knowledge set is presented and then undermined by another. This is often accomplished by changing the perspective of the hearer or viewer in order to alter the meaning or implications of the first scenario or information given. Young (2008) further theorizes about the cognitive processing mechanisms that must be utilized when an individual has a humor response. In an attempt to develop a theory-laden explanation of cognitive processing of humor, he posits that processing of comedic messages may undermine argument scrutiny. Previously, processing of humor has been thought of as putting a high cognitive load upon the viewer, and has therefore been conceptualized as a highly active process. Young (2008), however, differentiates between two kinds of processing – processing of competing scripts, or the cognitive activity necessary to understand the joke, versus processing of the argument being presented. Young asserts that the cognitive activity necessary to process the joke will inhibit the activity needed to evaluate the joke's premise. Experimental results confirmed that, when controlling for responses that indicated program enjoyment, argument scrutiny was much lower for humorous messages than non-humorous messages.

In light of this, what role does the situation comedy play in addressing social inequalities? Humorous television has consistently been more receptive to casting women (McNeil, 1975; Glascock, 2001). Comedy programming contained more recurring female roles and allocated more speaking time to female characters than did dramatic programming. However, it has been theorized that this is because women's roles may be less restrictive when material is not meant to be taken seriously (McNeil, 1975). Fouts and Burgraff (2000) found that women in comedies were more likely to be underweight than women in other types of shows. When females were overweight, negative comments regarding their size increased, as did the audience's laughter. This indicates that humor, while producing positive affect in the audience, relies on the juxtaposition of competing scripts ('normal' women vs. 'overweight' or 'non-normative women') that trivialize larger social issues. In an effort to understand how often sexual harassment (touching, indecent quid-pro-quo offers) and gender harassment (negative comments, looking, sexual references) were perpetuated in workplace sitcoms, Montemurro (2003) analyzed a sample of programming and found that approximately 78 percent of episodes viewed contained an incident of gender harassment in the form of a joke. Montemurro noted that, while gender discrimination in these humorous scenarios may seem less overt than sexual harassing behaviors (such as looks or touching), sexually harassing jokes are much more pervasive than overt discrimination. Given previous findings that indicate comedy may be the genre most frequented by female leads (Glascock, 2001, McNeil, 1975), it seems pertinent to examine how the portrayal of the sexes may differ.

Quality of life can be determined both by the types of needs a character expresses as well as a character's ability to meet those needs. Because it is difficult when using content analysis to examine larger social structures at work within a televised landscape, the expression of needs

provides insight into cultural scripts about what needs are relevant, as well as how the meeting of those needs relates to character agency. While there is no exact hierarchy between how the need is met (a character meeting their own need would not necessarily be more agentic than a character going to a superior to have their need met), this type of analysis affords researchers a chance to examine how different genders attempt to meet their needs on television and if those attempts are successful.

In response to these compounded factors, I executed the following study which examined the link between character gender and quality of life issues in post-recession workplace-based situation comedies. Some of the delimitations of this study were that it provided a starting point for gathering frequencies of need type expressed by characters in workplace sitcoms. This is useful for mass media research because, as social cognitive theory posits, for those with limited experience about a situation, media messages can provide models for behavior and expectations about the situation. Another delimitation of the study was that it provided data about use of humor in relation to need and gender, a production feature that gives insight about what needs are being naturalized in regard to quality of life on television. One limitation of this study is that it did not examine the way in which workers may use humor as for coping and socialization within the workplace (Tracy, Meyers & Scott, 2006). The following research questions were asked:

RQ1: Are certain need types expressed more for one gender than another?

RQ2: Are certain needs consistently unmet?

RQ2a: If so, do they appear more for one gender over another?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between need type and the use of humor?

RQ4: Are needs met more as a product of happenstance or of agentic action?

RQ5: Is there a relationship between gender of character and use of humor in relation to the expression of needs?

RQ6: Were needs met more by superior more often for one gender than another?

Methods

The purpose of this analysis was to determine agency as it related to quality of life among characters in situation workplace comedies and how humor was used in relation to the expression and fulfillment of those needs. Coders and the researcher investigated quality of life indicators for characters within American workplace related situation comedies defined by parent networks as workplace sitcoms, and that have at least one full season between the years of 2008 and 2012. Attempts at humor were coded when in conjunction with the expression of needs. Coders recorded the manner of needs being met – via affected character agency, help from another character, or happenstance (the phenomena where events unfold in a fortuitous way where the manner of meeting the need is indirect) in order to determine agency in the meeting of needs.

Sample

Sampling was purposive in determining which programs fit the necessary criteria. In order to locate programs that met the sample criteria, a search was conducted on the open forum site Wikipedia for all sitcoms. While the list may be edited and maintained by members of the general public, utilizing the site as a resource has benefits. The first is that many independent contributors provide the content for the site as opposed to a network aggregator that would only include programs from the host network. Additionally, networks do not provide comprehensive lists of past broadcasts on their websites that are no longer in production. In this regard, utilizing an aggregator site was helpful because contributors are required to link to some external source. Often this source was the programs individual Wikipedia page which was linked to its listing on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB). Shows found to be within the time frame were researched and it was determined whether or not the majority of the show focused on the workplace based on their IMDB descriptions. Shows chosen were 30 Rock (NBC), Parks and Recreation (NBC),

The Office (NBC), Better Off Ted (ABC), Reno 911 (Comedy Central), Scrubs (ABC), It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia (FX), 2 Broke Girls (CBS), and Workaholics (Comedy Central. Coders accessed shows via a shared Netflix account. For shows not available through Netflix, the coders shared from their personal DVD collection, and for shows not available through these methods, DVD copies were requested through interlibrary loan.

From a determined nine shows that met these criteria, one random constructed year of the sample was compiled by selecting 90 episodes for analysis. Each episode was given a unique number and a random number generator provided the corresponding numbers for those used in the sample. Uribe and Manzur (2012), in attempting to determine the most representative sample from a year of magazine ads that were circulated weekly, found that the best means by which to generalize to a year's worth of magazines was to use a constructed year of magazine issues, or three issues from each calendar season totaling 12 issues. Uribe and Manzur elected to use constructed years based on differences in advertising content from season to season. Because this is not likely a factor in sitcom content from season to season with relation to needs, our sample was chosen by assigning each episode in the sample frame a number and using a random number generator to identify 90 unique episodes and 10 overlap sample episodes. Shows chosen for analysis must have contained complete seasons that aired between the years 2008 and 2012.

A possible limitation to this sampling scheme is that though all of these programs are available for purchase, it is possible that real time broadcasts may have been subject to errors not found in the released DVD recordings.

A delimitation to this sampling choice is that coders were able to directly view programs that were available for situation comedy viewers in regard to quality of life portrayed in the

workplace within this time frame as opposed to viewing large amounts of recorded programming and attempting to locate these programs. Because the number of work related sitcoms is not large in comparison to the full broadcast menu, having the programs preselected for viewing based on network description was more convenient than sifting through all programming from the time frame.

Measures

Operational definitions used in this study were developed based on the hierarchy of needs as developed by Maslow (1958), which has been used extensively in social science research. A manifest typology was developed based on this content and each expression of a need (a character expressing a desire for one of the following needs) was coded. Brief examples of the typology follow (for full codebook, see Appendix B):

Physiological needs. Physiological needs are those directly related to the maintenance of homeostasis. These needs would present overtly as: extreme cravings or excessive eating of a certain type of food (excessive eating of healthy foods might suggest a need for certain nutrients, excessive eating of unhealthy foods would imply an undermining of homeostasis – both of these things would ultimately indicate that homeostasis was not being maintained.), extreme sleepiness, lethargy, or inordinate amounts of energy, or a character being choked or otherwise deprived of oxygen, extreme sadness or giddiness that has not been explained as a result of some plot device.

Safety needs. Safety needs are characterized by the need that people have for order and consistency in their day to day lives. Safety needs entail overt statements or reactions made by the character that indicate they feel their safety (physical or emotional) is in danger. This may be

a result of feedback (poor job performance leads to a bad evaluation and the character worries about the outcome), or may be a function of neuroses (or the character worries about a perceived danger that seems disproportionate to a rational outcome of events). Sub categories for justified safety concerns and imagined safety concerns will be coded as justified or neurotic.

Affiliatory needs. Affiliatory needs refer to a person's need for relationships. There are two proposed types of affiliatory needs. The first implies those of family, romantic relationships and close friendships. Evidence of these types of affiliatory needs will be any mention of romantic relationships, family relationships, or close friendships. Presence of these types of affiliatory needs being met will be coded in the event that they are expressly mentioned as going well or manifest examples of thoughtful behavior (receiving a gift from such a person, phone calls from a loved one that display interest or concern in the characters life). Absence was coded if a) absence of such relationships are mentioned in relation to a character or by a character in regard to themselves, or b) if a relationship is mentioned as being present but unfulfilling or unsatisfactory (family trouble, disagreements with friends or romantic partners). In the event that there was a problem with a relationship and the problem was resolved within the course of the episode, both presence and absence were be recorded under different instances. A second type of affiliatory need is that for inclusion among the general population or some subgroup within the population. This presented as a character feeling isolated from the general population or from the subgroup of other workers. Absence of such inclusion manifested as any isolation from other workers or expressing the emotion that the character 'does not fit in' (either in reference to self or when another character references the character).

Esteem needs. Esteem needs are twofold in that an individual has a desire to feel competent and able and a desire for the recognition by others as being capable. The expression of

self-perceived competency was coded when a character expressed (in spoken form or in confident posture when given a task or challenge) adequate ability to perform the task at hand or inadequacy at performing the task. The desire for recognition as being capable included feedback from others regarding performance (either positive or negative or negative feedback provided for results that were satisfactory in actuality). This manifested as verbal feedback (positive or negative), or some display of recognition (a high-five, a salary increase, a pay decrease, a suspension).

Self-actualization needs. Self-actualization needs refer to the characters desire to fulfill a greater purpose within the world. These were coded by expressions of lifelong goals ("I've always wanted to go to Italy/learn to paint, etc."). If the character achieved these goals, self-actualization was coded as present. If the character expressed that the fulfilment of the goal "will never happen", it was coded as absent. In the event that a character did something or experienced some stimulus which they later refer to as being life-changing or altering in some way, self-actualization was coded as present. As with affiliatory needs, if a desire for such a thing is expressed and then plans are foiled (or vice-versa-- character thinks he/she will not achieve a goal and then does), both instances were coded as present and then absent, respectively.

For the purposes of this study, the expression of needs was recorded as nominal data. While the argument could be made that a character that does not express an extreme absence or presence of a need may have adequate levels of the stimuli that the need is associated with, this cannot be expressly inferred from the content at the manifest level. Moreover, we can be confident that if a character is not expressing a deficit of some need, the content producers do not intend viewers to associate that particular quality of life indicator with the character at that time. Additionally, humorous attempts were coded when they appeared directly in relation to mention

of needs. "Humorous attempts" entail instances where coders find direct attempts within the content that are perceived to elicit humor. Attempt at humor has been more successfully coded than identification of humor types (Buijzuen and Valkenbug, 2004, Neuendorf, 2002) and indicates where viewers feel content producers intend something to be funny. The unit of analysis for quality of life is characters that express needs. Characters were also coded for gender, age, race, and job type. Additionally, when a need was met, the coders coded who met the need, self, other, or an identifiable superior (boss/supervisor).

Coder Training

Four communication students received fifteen hours of coder training over a five-week period. During the first two weeks, coders were given clarification about the definitions of terms and short exercises in coding similar content occurred in a classroom setting. Questions that arose from these weeks were clarified or the coding protocol was altered. Three weeks into the training, coders coded the reliability sample separately. The reliability sample was assessed using Scott's Pi (Neuendorf, 2002) as it is sufficient for use with nominal data. However, reliability was not met (agreement for these variables ranged from .95 agreement for character gender to .01 for presence of humor). The design of the study attempted to use a measurement tool (Maslow's hierarchy) that has not been used to assess television content before. Because reliability was not met, we utilized percent agreement for purposes of discussing findings and all variables had near 70% agreement. Percent agreements were as follows: Gender, 98%; Race, 94%; Age, 86%; Job Category,76%; Need Type, 69%; Need Justified, 78; Need Met, 70%; Need Met by Whom, 65%; Need met by Superior, 95%; and Presence of Humor, 73%. While the use of percent agreement is not a stringent enough measure to deem the results replicable, the study attempted to define new measurement parameters for latent content such as humor that has

historically been difficult to code (Neuendorf, 2002, p.147). Further, coding for need type as an indicator for quality of life has never been undertaken. The use of percent agreement in this case allowed this study to act as a pilot for assessing the measurements utility. Ten percent of the total sample was used for a reliability subset as has been accepted in previous social science literature (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994).

Results

A total of 2579 cases of expressed needs were reported. Of those expressed needs, 64.2% were expressed by men while 35.8% were expressed by women. The majority of characters coded were Caucasian (89.9%); African Americans represented 6.2% of the sample, with the remainder comprised of 1.9% Asian, 1.9% Hispanic, 0.4% mixed race characters, and 0.7% other. The coded characters were mostly middle aged persons (62.7%), followed by young adults (35.7%), elderly persons (1%), children (0.4%) and adolescents (0.2%). Of all characters who expressed a need, 40.9% were coded as working in a skilled labor profession (with 57.7% of them being male and 42.3% female). Semi-skilled labor professions comprised 36.6% of the sample (68% of those characters were male and 32% were female). Unskilled labor made up 16.7% of the sample (73.1% men and 26.9% women). The remainder of characters were not working (3%) (65.4% of that category comprised of men and 44.4% comprised of women), and 2.8% had unknown work status. As might be expected when examining workplace sitcoms, 64.1% of all needs expressed were expressed in workplace settings with 22.5% of needs expressed in locations categorized as 'other', 9.1% in social settings, and 4.3% at home.

Of all need types expressed, 30.9% were needs for emotional safety, and. 21.4% of needs expressed were for close involvement, the first type of affiliatory need. Of the remainder of needs expressed, 15.6% were for positive self-concept, 11.1% were for physical safety, 9.3% were for reward or praise, 4.3% were for belonging, 3.9% were for positive self-concept, and 3.6% were for physiological needs. While the justified and unjustified did not apply to cases that were not coded as safety needs (62.5% of all cases), nearly all safety needs (94.5%) were coded as justified.

RQ 1 asked if certain need types differed by character gender. A chi-square test (Table 1) revealed that there was a significant difference in need type based on sex ($\chi^2 = 21.719$, df = 7, $N = 2578$, $p < .005$, $V=.092$). Within the most commonly expressed need type, emotional safety, men expressed 61.2% of those needs while women only expressed 38.8%. Many of the need types mirrored the gender split among characters as a whole, with men to women nearing a sixty to forty percent split. However, in some cases need type and gender had a more noticeable split such as physiological needs (74.2% expressed by men and 25.8% by women), physical safety needs (72% by men and 28% by women), and self-actualization needs (72% by men, 28% by women).

RQ2 asked if certain needs were more consistently met or unmet than others (Table 2). A chi-square test revealed statistically significant results ($\chi^2 = 151.438$, $df = 7$, $N = 2577$, $p < .01$, $V = .242$). Most needs went unmet with a total of 61.8% of needs going unmet while 38.2% of needs were met. Needs on opposite ends of the hierarchy were less likely to be met. That is, physiological needs went unmet 73.1% of the time, physical safety needs went unmet 70.2% of the time, and need for self-actualization went unmet 62% of the time. The need for emotional safety (which comprised one third of all needs expressed), was unmet 75.5% of the time. The second most expressed need, need for close involvement, was met 52% of the time. The need for general or group belonging was met 56.4% of the time. Additionally, the need for positive self-concept and the need for reward were almost equally as likely to be met as to be unmet with the former met 54.1% of the time and the latter being met 55% of the time.

Research question 2A asked if certain needs that went unmet were associated with different genders (Table 3). A chi-square test revealed statistically significant findings for males ($\chi^2 = 99.08$, $df = 7$, $N = 1654$, $p < .05$, $V = .245$), as well as for females ($\chi^2 = 53.787$, $df = 7$, $N = $

932, $p < .05$, $V = .241$). The needs most consistently unmet, emotional safety, physiological, and physical safety, differed in small ways across genders. For men, emotional safety needs were 76.6% more likely to go unmet than to be met, and women fared not much better in this category with 73.8% of emotional safety needs going unmet. Physiological needs, while more likely to be expressed by men, went unmet 71% of the time for men, but 79.2% of the time when expressed by women. Physical safety needs, in contrast, went unmet 72.2% of the time for men, but went unmet only 65% of the time when expressed by women. So, when expressed, emotional safety needs were slightly less likely to be met for men and physiological needs were slightly less likely to be met for women. However, for physical safety needs, or threat of external bodily harm, women were more likely to have those needs met than were men. Although the numbers are similar, women fared a bit better with regard to the second highest need expressed, the need for close involvement, having that need met 53.5% of the time while men experienced that need being met 51% of the time. While all needs were usually more frequently expressed by male characters than by female characters, the need for self-actualization went unmet 69.3% of the time for men and only 57.1% of the time for women. The remaining three need categories were fairly evenly distributed. Male characters had 56.5% of their need for belonging met while women had those needs met 56.1% of the time. Similarly, the need for positive self-concept was met 45.2% of the time for male characters and 47% of the time for female characters, and need for reward was met 44.8% of the time for men and 45.5% of the time for women.

RQ3 asked if there was a significant difference between the expressions of certain need types and the use of humor (see Table 5). A chi square test revealed a statistically significant difference between use of humor and need type ($\chi^2 = 123.989$, $df = 7$, $N=2578$, $p < .001$, $V=.219$). Physiological needs were almost always accompanied by an attempt at humor; in

91.4% of expressions of a physiological need, humor was used. Similar traits emerged for physical safety needs with 86.4% of all cases of this need accompanied by humor. Emotional safety needs, the most commonly expressed need type comprising approximately one third of all needs expressed, was depicted in a humorous manner 84.7% of the time. The second most common need type, need for close involvement, was related to humor use 64.7% of the time. The need for belonging was seen with use of humor in 75.5% of cases, indicating differences between the two subsets of affiliatory needs when seen on workplace sitcoms. The third most common need type, need for positive self-concept, was used in conjunction with humor 70.8% of the time. In sharp contrast to other need types, the need for self-actualization only saw humor used in 59% of the cases. While this need type was not seen as often as others, these results indicate that when characters express a need for self- actualization on workplace sitcoms, they are treated with less levity than other need types.

RQ4 asked if more needs were met as a result of happenstance or via agentic action (Table 5). The majority of cases did not apply, as 61.9% of all needs expressed were not met. Of the needs that were met, 21.1% were met by other, 15.9% were met by self, and 1% of all needs were met by happenstance. When examining of who met a need by the gender of the character who expressed the need, a chi square analysis revealed statistically insignificant data (χ^2= 6.68, *df* = 3, N=2579, *p*=.083, *V*= .051). While results were not statistically significant, the number of cases in each category revealed that men had their needs met less often with 63.3% of needs expressed by males going unmet as opposed to 59.5% of all needs expressed by women going unmet. Further, women met their own needs 17.1% of the time while men met their own needs only 15.2% of the time. Similarly, women saw their needs met by others 22.8% of the time while men only saw their needs met by others 20.2% of the time. In contrast, though an extremely

small percentage of the overall sample (1%), men had their needs met via happenstance 0.8% of the time while women only saw needs met this way 0.2% of the time.

RQ5 asked if there was a relationship between gender of character and the use of humor in relation to the expression of a need (Table 6). A chi-square test revealed statistically insignificant data with regard to this research question ($\chi^2 = 3.449$, $df = 1$, N=2579, $p=.063$, $V=-.037$). Humor was generally a constant with 64.2% of all cases being used in conjunction with humor. Additionally, the percentage of humor present or not present across genders generally mirrored the sample demographics with 61.1% of cases where humor was not used being represented by male characters and 38.9% by females, and 65.2% of cases where humor was present represented with male characters and 34.8% by female characters. We can ascertain, then, that there is no association between character gender and the expression of needs.

RQ6 asked if needs met by other were more often met by superior for one gender than another (Table 7). A chi-square test revealed statistically insignificant data ($\chi^2 = 3.647$, $df = 1$, N=2577, $p=.056$, $V=.038$). Only 21.1% of all needs met were met by other and of that 21.1%, 57% of needs met by superior were expressed by male characters and 43% by female characters, indicating a divide close to the general distribution of men and women in the sample. This indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between character gender and having needs met by superior. Rather, it indicates that superiors meet few, if any, needs expressed by characters in workplace sitcoms.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine portrayals of quality of life in workplace sitcoms. The study was directed toward understanding how agency was portrayed among characters, particularly with respect to character gender, as research about agency and need type in television has not been widely examined. The findings are discussed in the context of the extant research on gender stereotypes in workplace and comedy programming, quality of life and agency, or humor theories and social cognitive theory. Part of this study's goal was to develop a coding instrument for such content; and while coder reliability was not met, findings from the sample can serve to direct future efforts examining quality of life and agency in television programming.

Gender Stereotypes, Workplace, and Comedy Programming

The findings of this study indicate that industry trends in workplace sitcoms are incorporating more equitable portrayals of men and women with regard to jobs of high prestige. As mentioned previously, comedy programming has often been more receptive to casting women than dramatic programming (McNeil, 1975; Glascock, 2001). However, with regard to lower-status jobs, the divide remains prevalent in these shows with women holding approximately 30% of unskilled labor jobs. This is interesting considering the workforce climate at the time, as it was dominated by the image of recent college graduates that were either unemployed or underemployed, usually working in service-industry fields.

It is surprising that our sample did not reveal gender stereotypes in terms of the expression of needs, as so many previous studies have found evidence of such stereotypes (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Davis, 1990; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen, Dozier, & Reyes,

2007; Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). While there were significant differences in which needs were expressed by which gender, the need types expressed were not indicative of those from previous literature, as is seen in the fact that men expressed approximately the same number of love needs as women when taking into account their percentage within the population. This may be a function of the fact that so much of the sample is from one production house. It could also be a function of the fact that at least two of the shows in the sample, *30 Rock* and *Parks and Recreation* have female stars that concurrently write and produce their respective shows. Assuming this accounts for some of the difference seen between our sample and past studies, Lauzen and Dozier (2004) may be correct in asserting that more women behind the camera equates with better portrayals of women onscreen.

Researchers (Glascock, 2001; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) have found that representation of men and women, while still inequitable, has evened out in recent decades. Some researchers (Lauzen & Dozier, 2004) attribute this to the fact that more women are becoming involved in production which has an impact on the percentage of female characters onscreen. Recent studies (Glascock, 2001; Lauzen, Dozier, & Cleveland, 2006) cite an approximate 60% male to 40% female split for character gender and the demographic findings of this study revealed similar numbers. The demographic analysis also revealed that the majority of characters who expressed a need were white (89.9 %) and middle-aged (62.7 %) as has been found in previous work (Signorielli, 2009). It is important to note, though, that characters were only coded when they expressed needs. However, the demographic data collected was encouraging in some ways with regard to gender stereotype on television. In the most prevalent job category, skilled labor, men and women comprised large portions of their gender demographic with 57.7 % of men falling into this category and 42.3 % of women falling into this category. This indicates a change in

representation, as previous studies found that women had prestigious jobs less often than men (Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999. The need most expressed, emotional safety, was expressed more often by men than women, and the distribution of the expression of that need mirrored the overall gender breakdown for all characters coded. The need for belonging and the need for positive self-concept were similarly distributed. However, men expressed physiological needs, physical safety needs, and self-actualization needs more frequently than women in the sample. That men expressed more physiological and physical safety needs in this sample supports previous research on violence seen on television as it has been observed that violence usually occurs among white males (Glascock, 2008). The near equal portrayal of characters expressing emotional safety needs as well as the high number of cases in which those needs are expressed indicate that the expression of emotional safety needs may be a staple in workplace comedy programming. That these needs are expressed in almost equal numbers by both genders on television is encouraging, as it suggests that stereotypes about women as poor leaders (Fueur, 1988) are losing support in popular media, and that emotional safety and close involvement needs function less as a representation of gender differences and rather as global needs expressed by both genders.

One observation that is important when considering the findings of this study is that two of the shows, *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation*, came from the same production company, Deedle-Dee Productions (Daniels, 2005). These programs were also co-produced by Universal Television which produced *30 Rock* in conjunction with Little Stranger, Inc. These three shows dominated the workplace sitcom landscape during the sampling frame and this is apparent when examining the proportions of those shows in the sample. Of the 90 episodes analyzed, 31 episodes were from either *The Office* or *Parks and Recreation* and an additional 18 were from *30*

Rock. The saturation of the sample with these shows indicates that in the 2008-2012 time frame, Deedle-Dee Productions and Universal Television were the primary industry producers of these programs. Two of the shows that dominated the sample have strong associations with women in principle production roles, which may be partially responsible for the high number of women in skilled labor jobs (Lauzen & Dozier, 2004).

Quality of Life and Agency

In this study, the examination of agency was predicated upon the idea that characters who are more agentic will have greater control over the undesirable aspects of their lives. As mentioned above, the study did not account for characters who expressed no needs (or who might have all the needs that we coded for met). The fact that the study did not account for this type of character is a weakness in design. However, given that this type of research has not been done before, this study provided a starting point for further research that examines need type as a function of quality of life and agency. What the study did reveal is that need types are gendered in some cases (though less so in regard to the most expressed needs), and that certain needs are less likely to be met, indicating that characters have less agency in those circumstances. What is omitted from this analysis is the third type of quality of life assessment mentioned by Diener and Suh (1997), the measurement that looks directly at how a person perceives their own life. It is possible that a character, despite manifest difficulty, might believe that he or she is experiencing a high quality of life. However, this type of reporting would be difficult to do given the method chosen for this study. Additionally, as plotlines are often driven by conflict or obstacle, it is relevant to examine how characters react to obstacles to achieving their goals, especially in workplace programming. Therefore, for purposes of this study, quality of life and agency were

assessed based upon the needs that characters expressed in relation to the characters ability to meet those needs.

In order to assess quality of life and agency, the study was designed to take account of which needs were met and unmet (RQ2), as well as if certain needs were more consistently met or unmet for men or women (RQ2A). Overall, 61.8 % of all needs went unmet and 38.2 % were met. Unmet needs seem to drive comedic stories; 76% of all needs were expressed in a humorous context. While unmet needs were generally the norm, there were differences in expressed and met/unmet needs both overall and by gender. Emotional safety needs, as discussed above, were expressed often but were rarely met. These needs were unmet almost equally for men and women. Though the majority of jobs onscreen were within the skilled labor category which indicates a high material quality of life for TV characters, emotional safety needs may serve as a bridge between the unemployed and underemployed and the characters in workplace sitcoms. Though unemployed and underemployed persons may not be able to relate directly with the level of job prestige that onscreen workers enjoyed, viewers may find commonality in the expression of emotional stress on television and their own experiences (Bandura, 1986). Stress has spiked in adults as a result of the economic depression (Despite some bright spots, 2010), and it may be that the portrayal of emotional safety needs resonates with viewers. The link between the emotional safety needs may also prove a fruitful ground for research when considered against the expression of physical safety needs, as the physical safety of characters has been scrutinized (Gerbner et al, 1978; Signorielli, 2003) and substituting needs of this sort with emotional safety needs may indicate a departure from slapstick gags and a turn toward emotional distress as a feature to elicit feelings of excitement in audiences. Studies that examine aggression on television (Glascock, 2008; Greenberg et al, 1980) have noted that verbal aggression is more

prevalent than physical violence in comedy programming. Signorielli (2003) found that males were more likely than females to commit and be the victims of violence which resonates with the observed distribution of physiological and physical safety needs within the sample.

By contrast to emotional safety needs being generally unmet, the second most expressed need, need for close involvement, was met a little over half of the time. Though representing fewer cases, women saw this need met slightly more often than did men. Similarly, the need for general or group belonging was met 56.4 % of the time for all genders, and percentages of cases met/unmet were nearly identical to the characters' gender split. The ramifications of this on perceptions of characters at work should not be overlooked. These findings indicate that the success of workplace sitcoms may be attributable to the fact that story arcs are centered on character relationships that feature these needs such as romance, friendship, and kinship (Aubrey et al., 2013; Sherry & DeSouza, 2005). This provides audiences with inclusive social scripts for envisioning new workers in the workforce. While younger viewers may not have much direct workplace experience, interpersonal scripts may bridge the distance between settings that are less familiar and those that are in the forefront of the minds of young adults (Bandura, 2001b). Future research might examine the propensity to use emotional safety needs in post-recession versus in earlier years, as well as comparing their use in different genres of programming. Encouragingly, the fact that these needs were met almost equally for both genders seems to indicate that depictions for this need may be close to equitable in workplace comedy programming.

Some of the less frequently expressed needs saw more drastic gender divides. The need for positive self-concept and the need for reward were met almost as often as not, with the former met 54.1 % of the time and the latter being met 55 % of the time with close to identical percentages across gender (although the number of cases of these needs was far below those for

emotional safety or belonging). The need for self-actualization, while comprising a very small percentage of total needs, was expressed more often by males (72 % versus 28 %) but was met more often for females (42.9 % met compared to 36.1 % met for males). This may indicate that male characters' long-term goals are portrayed in conjunction with scripts that deny male characters self-actualization. Raskin's (1985) work on humor suggests a model that negates a predicted outcome of a cultural script which makes the situation humorous. Because the exact mental processes that accompany humor are unspecified, it is difficult to be sure if the presence of humor is indicated by competing gender scripts, or if the humor arises as a result of other competing scripts in the expression of needs such as class or race. However, the findings concerning physiological and self-actualization needs indicate that gender is used in specific ways with these needs which bears further scrutiny.

Research question four was designed to measure character agency by tracking which characters met their own needs, which had needs met by others, and which had needs met by happenstance. Research question six asked if, when needs were met by others, who had needs met by a workplace superior. Of the 38% of cases with met needs, more women met their own needs or had their needs met by others than men, which may belie a trend towards agentic female characters. When characters of either gender saw their needs met by other, those needs were rarely met by someone identifiable as a superior. This may be because a large portion of the sample was comprised of highly skilled professionals often in specialized jobs. The focus on characters at the top of their career field within their workplaces would likely afford those characters higher agency as they are acting experts in those settings. The majority of characters in the sample had both adequate physical resources, one criterion of quality of life (Diener &Suh, 1997), and high levels of efficacy in their profession (Bandura, 2001a) as a result of having

specialized knowledge sets. That superiors were rarely involved in the process of meeting needs seems to be both a function of material quality of life on television as well as character agency.

Humor and Social Cognitive Theory

Humor was used in the majority of the cases observed and was split almost evenly between needs expressed by men and women. There were subtle differences in the use of humor and need type. Of physiological needs, humor was used in 91.4 % of cases, the highest of all need types. The concentration of physiological needs with humor might arise from the fact that audience members do not expect these types of portrayals to be realistic depictions of such situations, as explained by Raskin's (1985) semantic script theory. Young (2008) hypothesizes that humor diminishes argument scrutiny, which becomes problematic when characters are experience overtly detrimental, psychological needs. Given that men experienced these more often than women, and the fact that fulfilling of this need often precludes the meeting of other needs, the almost constant use of humor in conjunction with this need gives some insight into formal features of workplace comedies or how certain storylines or gags might be used frequently within the industry.

Needs that saw humor used the least often were the needs for close involvement and self-actualization. Close involvement saw almost equal numbers of men and women expressing that need, but self-actualization was more often expressed by men, and frequently went unmet. It is possible that close-involvement and self-actualization are used in more serious contexts than other need types. The nature of these humorous portrayals would also provide a good starting point for further study. Given these findings, one potential avenue for research might focus on short-term, immediate needs such as physiological and safety needs and how they differ from

long term needs such as belonging, esteem needs, or the need for self-actualization. This could

be done by examining the timing that such needs arise within one episode or throughout a season

of a show.

   This study's coding scheme relied upon coders' implicit understanding of humor. This

method has garnered support in the literature (Neuendorf, 2002; Buijzen and Valkenberg, 2004),

as members of a certain culture are often aware of cultural scripts that are meant to be humorous.

Because coder reliability was not met, it is impossible to generalize these findings to the entire

population of programming at the time. Despite this fact, the data collected can reveal some

things about comedy programming in terms of need type, though use of humor was unreliable.

We can ascertain that the programs examined were somewhat successful, as none of the sitcoms

were cancelled in their first season. More can be understood about the function of humor in

relation to televised needs when the mechanisms and contexts that disrupt argument scrutiny

(Young, 2008) are better understood, and when more is known about how social scripts are used

to elicit humor (Raskin, 1985).

   The study used social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) to consider situations of low

viewer familiarity with scripts about gender norms presented on television. Because we did not

examine viewers beliefs about work or programming, support for the theory itself cannot be

established. We can conclude that, in the event that social cognitive theory has implications for

viewers with little direct experience with a situation, viewers with little to no work experience

may believe that workplace scenarios are based largely upon interpersonal dynamics. Given that

the majority of the sample was comprised of workers in highly skilled professions, viewers may

believe this to be true even in those kinds of careers. This finding better informs existing

literature on the subject (Signorelli, 2009; Xenos, Moy & Becker, 2009).We can also conclude

that workplace sitcoms provide few scripts that deal with superior-subordinate workplace hierarchies in terms of need fulfillments. Concerns about less-agentic women in TV (McNeil, 1975; Signorielli, 2009), then, become more nuanced. While both genders are represented as being successful at work in terms of prestige, the obstacles they overcome onscreen are less about career fulfillment than they are about interpersonal relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

The major limitations of this study are that coders failed to meet reliability barring results from being generalizable to the population of programming within the sampling frame. Comedy programming has historically been difficult to code (Neuendorf, 2002) as content is highly subjective and relies upon cultural understandings of content and scenarios. However, other studies have had success when coding humorous intent (Buijzen & Valkenberg, 2004), indicating that these results were not necessarily indicative of the coding scheme itself, only of this attempt to use the methodology in this way. Other limitations are that these definitions of agency do not necessarily reflect upon quality of life. If a given character expresses no needs for physical safety, that need is satiated in terms of the onscreen portrayal. Rather, this definition of agency relies upon the ability of characters to overcome obstacles. Viewers may see a character as having a high quality of life because they express no needs. However, it stands to reason that within a storytelling format that is driven by conflict, major characters will experience needs, and that major characters will also be the primary focal point of the program.

Future directions for this research might examine the expression of needs across types of programming and in relation to different eras or timeframes of television content. Though expression of needs has not been assessed before, these findings indicate that representations of

both genders on television are changing. Future research might attempt to better understand the context for this shift. If, as some scholars posit (Lauzen, Dozier, & Cleveland, 2006) higher women behind the scenes leads to better representations onscreen, we would expect to see that when altering the timeframe of the sample taken. Additionally, more work can be done to better understand how viewers interpret agency and quality of life. It is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize the findings from this type of content analysis to populations of viewers. However, future research would benefit from allowing viewer perceptions to guide the ways in which the concepts within the codebook are quantified.

Conclusion

The examination of agency in character portrayal is relatively new and the use of need type to assess quality of life has been unexamined until now. While coder reliability was not adequate, the use of these measurements and the findings that emerged from the sample indicate that the techniques are useful for identifying trends and formal features in programming. Humor studies have typically encountered difficulty in identifying the reasons for which audiences find different content humorous (Buijzen and Valkenberg, 2004), though this does not discount the importance of understanding these features more fully. Continuing to address the nature and use of humor in inventive ways will aid in identifying not only which methods are useful, but also which aspects of television might be examined further. As findings from this study indicate, there were distinctive features which were used consistently within the time frame analyzed, and those features can be used to better understand industry trends and audience preference. That many of these programs were successful by industry standards is an indication that those techniques will likely continue to be used or will be improved, rendering them important avenues for scholarship.

Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Need Type by Gender

Need Type

Gender	Physiological	Physical Safety	Emotional safety	Close involvement	Belonging	Positive Self Concept	Reward	Self-Actualization
Men	74.2%	72%	61.2%	61.1%	62.7%	62.8%	67.9%	72%
Women	25.8%	28%	38.8%	38.9%	37.3%	37.2	32.1%	28%

$\chi = 21.719$, $df = 7$, $N = 2578$, $p = <.005$, $V = .092$

Table 2: Need Type Met and Unmet

Need Type

Met/Unmet	Physiological	Physical Safety	Emotional safety	Close involvement	Belonging	Positive Self Concept	Reward	Self-Actualization
Met	26.9%	29.8%	24.5%	52%	56.4%	45.9%	45%	38%
Unmet	73.1%	70.2%	75.5%	48%	43.6%	54.1	55%	62%

$(\chi^2 = 151.438$, df = 7, N=2577, p < .005, V = .242$)$

Table 3: Need Type Met by Gender

	Gender			
Need Type	Men		Women	
	Met	Unmet	Met	Unmet
Physiological	29.0%	71.0%	20.8%	79.2%
Physical Safety	27.8%	72.2%	35.0%	65.0%
Emotional Safety	23.4%	76.6%	26.2%	73.8%
Close Involvement	51.0%	49.0%	53.5%	46.5%
Belonging	56.5%	42.35%	56.1%	43.9%
Positive Self-Concept	45.2%	54.8%	47.0%	53.0%
Self-Actualization	44.8%	55.2%	45.5%	54.5%

Men: ($\chi^2 = 99.080$, $df = 7$, $N = 1654$, $p = <.005$, $V = .245$)

Women: ($\chi^2 = 53.787$, $df = 7$, $N = 923$, $p = ,.005$, $V = .241$)

Table 4: Use of Humor with Need Type

	Need Type							
	Physiological	Physical Safety	Emotional Safety	Close Involvement	Belonging	Positive Self Concept	Need for Reward	Self-Actualization
Present	91.4%	86.4%	84.7%	64.7%	75.5%	70.8%	73.3%	59.0%
Absent	8.6%	13.6%	15.3%	35.3%	24.5%	29.2%	26.7%	41.0%

($\chi^2 = 123.989$, $df = 7$, $N = 2578$, $p = <.005$, $V = .219$)

Table 5: Need Met by Whom

	Met by whom			
Character Gender	Does not Apply	Self	Other	Happenstance
Man	63.3%	15.2%	20.2%	1.3%
Woman	59.5%	17.1%	22.8%	0.7%

$$(X^2 = 6.680, df = 3, N = 2579, p = .083, V = .051)$$

Table 6: Presence of Humor by Gender

Humor	Gender	
	Male	Female
Present	77.4%	74.1%
Absent	22.6%	25.9%

$$(\chi^2 = 3.449, df = 1, N = 2579, p = .036, V = .063)$$

Table 7: Need Met by Superior by Character Gender

Met by Whom	Gender	
Met by Superior	Men	Women
Met by Superior	5.2%	7.0%
Not met by Superior	94.8%	93.0%

$$(\chi^2 = 3.64, df = 1, N = 2577, p = .056, V = .038)$$

Appendi^x B: Coding Protocol

**Quality of Life Indicators in characters
Of American situation comedies set in the workplace**

Content Analysis Protocol

Part 1: Introduction

This protocol will be used to analyze content of situation comedies. This study aims to discover which quality of life indicators are expressed by characters in situation comedies that are set primarily in the workplace. Additionally, the agency of the character to meet needs will be coded as an indication of the ability they have to affect change in their surroundings.

Major Concepts

Quality of Life
Refers to the characters expressed needs (need for homeostasis, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization) as well as character's agency in meeting those needs (character meeting his or her own needs, another meeting a character's needs, or happenstance). Though a character may have a certain need category met, the need will not be coded if the character does not express the need before receiving the fulfillment of the need.

Needs
Material and emotional resources which cause the individual to experience changes in comfort (physical) or satisfaction (emotional) and includes references to past needs.

For the purposes of this study, "needs" are taken from Maslow's hierarchy of needs and are utilized in order to ascertain a character's quality of life in the domain of the workplace. Needs in this case are identified by verbal, visual, or nonverbal (sound) indicators. The unit of analysis will be the scene – each individual need will be coded in a given scene, but multiple expressions of the same need will be coded once as opposed to multiple times.

Physiological Needs: Changes in a characters homeostasis as indicated by extreme lack of or excessive sleep, of malnourishment, cravings, excessive overeating, extreme cold, extreme illness, or indications that one is unable to function due to internal disruption. These needs are characterized as being necessary for the characters basic biological functioning.

Safety Needs: Changes in characters wellbeing marked by external injury, conditions of uncertainty in regard to daily functioning, continued employment (material safety), or general uncertainty regarding the future (workplace or otherwise).
 Refer to a characters need for order and understanding in reference to the self.

Affiliatory Needs: Changes in the characters wellbeing marked by an expressed (verbal or nonverbal) absence or presence of inclusion in either close personal relationships such as a family or close friendship or in a group or organization.

Esteem Needs: The need a character has to both feel competent at a given task as well as the need for recognition from others regarding that competency.

Self-Actualization Needs: The need a character feels to find a larger pattern within the events of their life, often in reference to a calling or destiny.

Gender

For purposes of this study, character gender will refer to the way in which the character presents their gender (male, female, or other).

Situation Comedy

Situation comedies analyzed include only programming billed as such that had full seasons broadcast between the years 2008 and 2012 and are described as taking place primarily in the workplace or shows that, based on synopses, have a strong workplace element.

Setting

For the purpose of this study, the notion of "workplace" will include work settings as they are depicted in sitcoms that are billed as "workplace comedies" or comedies that primarily take place at work. Scenes occurring outside of the workplace (office, hospital, construction yard, etc.) will be coded as "work", "home", "social", or "other".

Job Classification

Job classification refers to the classification of the job of the character in question with regard to licensure or certification, training, and level of expertise.

Characters

For the purpose of this study, "characters" will refer to any character that expresses a need. If information is not available for nonrecurring characters (unnamed, extras, etc.), the coder will code all available information (gender, need, need met or unmet, met via agency or happenstance).

Part 2: Procedures

While you can code anywhere (home or the Multimedia Lab), be sure that you are free from distractions when you sit down to code as this will help ensure that we maintain reliability throughout the procedure and obtain valid data.

Print off a copy of the codebook and read through it before you code. While it may not have changed since our last formal meeting, this will help the group in maintaining reliability.

Your individual coding samples will be assigned. You will be given a list that will provide you with the Show title, Episode name, and season and episode number. You will access the shared Netflix account, search for the season number, identify the episode you are to code (be sure the title and the episode number match your coding assignment), and you will code that episode. Watch the whole episode in its entirety before returning to code the episode.

Our unit of analysis will be the **scene**, which in this case means a **distinct setting change**. If a character flashes backward or forward in time but then returns to the same scene in order to continue the plotline within that scene, the flashback or flash forward should be coded as part of the scene that it is edited into. However, if the flashback/forward is in a different setting than the setting of the original scene, you will record 'scene' as it is presented in the flashback.

After you watch the episode in its entirety once, go back through and watch one scene, code the expressed needs in that scene, and then move to the next scene. You may have to go back and re-watch part – breaking the coding up by scene will give you a good standard for when to stop and analyze.

For purposes of this study, we will only code needs once that are expressed within the scene. If a character needs water, code this once even if the character asks for water multiple times in the scene. However, if a character asks for water again in a different scene, code that again in a new case. If a character expresses multiple separate needs within one scene, code all distinct needs (a need for esteem and a need for approval would both be coded even within the same scene).

You'll type your name in the first box of the spreadsheet provided and then go on to specify details that will be given to you such as show season, episode number, title, etc.

When you get to the box for "character name, watch the episode until you find a variable to code and then start coding with that character. If you do not know the character's name, you may want to watch either part of or the entire episode before you begin coding. If a character is not named, type in what the character is billed as in the closing credits ("subway lady"). If name is still indeterminate after reviewing the credits, type "unknown".

When recording time, use **<u>time remaining</u>** as an indicator of the time the act you are coding occurs.

When typing in the description of the need, type in the **<u>exact</u>** dialogue that you hear when you determine that you should code the need. If the cue is nonverbal, type in what you see that indicates you should code a need.

When recording character's expressed needs, record the corresponding number as they follow in the next section without any decimal points (a physical safety need would be coded as "21", not as "2.1").

Part 3: Coding Variables and Categories

Coder Name
Type your name under the 'coder' variable in the Excel spreadsheet

Show Title
Type the name of the show as it appears on the screen

Show Network
Type the name of the network on which the program airs. This will be provided with your coding sample.

Show Season
Record the season of the show in the corresponding column in the Excel spreadsheet.

Episode Number
Record the episode number (the number of the episode within that season) in the corresponding column.

Episode Title
Record the episode title in the corresponding column. These will be provided for you.

Character Name
Under 'character' column, type character name as it appears in the opening or closing credits.

Gender
Record character gender as it presents in the episode as
    Male
    Female
    Other

Race
Race will be coded as either
    African American
    Asian
    Caucasian
    Hispanic
    Mixed
    Other

Age
Characters will be coded as either a
    Child
    Adolescent
    Young adult

Middle age
Elderly

Job Classification
Characters job classification will be recorded as either

Highly Trained Professions: Refers to persons who are experts in their field (doctors, lawyers, university professors, psychiatrists, scientists, researchers, computer programmers, certified public accountants, city planners, etc.) or persons who are the acting expert in their place of work (detectives, CEO's, managers, professional actors, etc.) A person of this classification would have a license or certification, usually in conjunction with a higher than high school education, or would be the acting expert or officiate in the workplace, or would have a highly developed set of specialized skills. Persons in this category would be expected to have a high degree of training in their chosen field.

Moderately Trained Professions: Refers persons who do work that requires some skill but not expert level skill (clerical workers, nurses, counselors, non-detective police force, lab technicians, dental hygienists, human resource workers, training and development personnel, bank tellers, etc.). Though a worker may possess a license or certification to do a certain job, one does not need to possess a terminal degree in order to be employed. Persons in this category would be expected to have some training, but not be considered acting experts in their field.

Little/No Training Professions: Refers to service industry jobs. Waiters/table bussers, manual laborers, construction or manufacturing workers, farmhands, retail salespeople, and service staff comprise this categorization. Entry to this category does not require a bachelor's degree or any type of professional or associate training. While persons in this field may have some instruction and be highly efficient at a given task, the requirements for entry into the field are low and the amount of training to begin in that field would be low.

Not working

Unknown

Setting
Setting will be coded as either
    Work – scenes that are expressly portrayed as being at work as determined by the shows definition of where the workplace is
    Home – A character must be in a clearly domestic setting
    Social – instances of socialization outside of workplace settings
    Other

Time
Record the approximate time that you observe the need to have occurred. Use the time remaining when you pause the video on the line that indicates you should code the act.

Description
Type in the exact dialogue that you hear when you decide to code for a need. If the indication of the need is nonverbal, record a short description of what you see that indicates that this is a need ("JD looks scared").

Need Type
Need in this case correlates to observable (verbal or visual) indicators of presence or absence of needs being met as Maslow defines needs. If a need that falls under the following categories is expressly mentioned either verbally or visually, code the need by typing the corresponding number of the need into the cell in the spreadsheet. You will code the number of the need (for example, an affiliatory need is coded as a 3) and some needs have subsets attached to them that are indicated by a letter (for example, an affiliatory need that implies a need for inclusion or belonging as opposed to a close friendship with one person or unit would be coded as "32")

Physiological Needs: Refer to needs a person has for the resources to fulfill basic human function (food, water, sleep, etc.).
When a character is portrayed as needing adequate nutrition, sleep, chemical balance, or as overeating, craving foods, or expressing extreme emotion that is not explained in the plotline, you would code a physiological need.
    All expressions of internal bodily needs fall into this category.

Safety Needs: Needs the individual has for physical and emotional safety. When a character expresses a need for safety, determine if the need is for physical safety or emotional safety.

Physical safety needs: Needs a character has to maintain bodily safety in the face of external threats.

Emotional safety needs: Needs a character has to feel secure about their emotional safety (does or does not fear abandonment or isolation, emotional discomfort, or extreme insecurity). Emotional safety needs refer to direct threats to a characters emotional safety that would be indicated by shock, fear, or extreme emotional discomfort that prevents them from functioning normally.

Affiliatory Needs: Needs for connectedness, friendship, kinship, intimacy, approval, guidance, or feeling connected to a group or society. Once you've identified that a need falls into this category, determine if it is a need for close involvement or a need to belong to or fit in with a group or society.

Close involvements: Romantic involvements, relationships involving intimacy, close personal friendships, interpersonal relationships, interpersonal need for approval, interpersonal guidance, and the sense of belonging to a family unit.

General feelings of belonging: Feelings of association or affinity with a group or society as a whole and needs for approval from a group or society as a whole. May be observed by presence of friendly acquaintances or a general expression about one's belonging to an organization or society.

Esteem Needs: Needs expressed in relation to either a person's feeling of competency at a certain task or to a person's perception that they are recognized for their work.

Need for positive self-concept: The need for positive self-concept entails feelings of adequacy and competency. These feelings are directly related to a character's *internal perception* of their own competency. A character must express the adequacy or inadequacy to perform a task or overcome a work-related challenge.

Need for reward/praise: The need for recognition is indicated by the character expressing a need to be recognized by others in relation to job performance or adequacy with regard to competency or task completion. Need for reward and praise refers to a characters need for *external approval* of their task performance. A character must express the need for praise or recognition.

Needs for Self-Actualization: The need to recognize one's true potential. Needs for self-actualization must include statements about life goals, long-term plans, or the sentiment that a character has 'found their calling' or hopes to discover their destiny. This may refer to a plan they have devised, and insinuations that events are falling into place with a given course of action. Rather than inclusion needs or esteem needs, self-actualization indicates a larger cohesive plan or destiny. When characters express that they have found self-actualization through inner monologue, you should code a 5 here as well. When you see an example of a self-actualization need, code a **5**.

Justified or Unjustified

If you coded a 2 in the previous column,
Code a **1** in this column if the need was justified (character had reason to believe that safety was at risk because the threat was present or some indication was given that the threat to safety was likely to occur)

or

Code a **2** in this column if there was no justification for the character to fear a safety violation (no physical, visual, or nonverbal cues were given that the safety violation was likely to occur).

If you did not code a 2 in the previous column, this variable is not applicable so you would enter a **0**.

Met or Unmet
After you have coded need type, code whether or not the character is lacking the need or experience fulfillment of need.

Code a 0 for need unmet if the need is expressed but not fulfilled.

Code a 1 for need met for need that is expressed and fulfilled within the scene.

Met by Whom
You will record how the characters need was met by recording either
    None
    Self
    Other
    Happenstance

Met by Superior

If the **characters need is met by another character and it is indeterminate if the need is met by a superior, record a 0 in this column.**

If you coded a 2 in the previous category and the need was **met by a character who is identifiable to you as a superior of the character in question, record a 1 in this column**.

Humor
If the expressed need is shown in a manner that is intended to be humorous. If the need **is portrayed in a form that attempts to elicit a humorous response from the audience, code a 1 in this column. If no attempt at humor is present, code a 0.**

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